

The debate over comprehensive health care reform has taken center stage on Capitol Hill and I am gravely concerned about the legislation currently being considered.

The government should not wade into health care decisions between doctors and patients with private health insurance, which is ultimately what will occur under the current House proposal. The bill establishes a new "Health Benefits Advisory Committee" within the Department of Health and Human Services that proposes a minimum coverage standard that will eventually apply to virtually all health plans. Additionally, if a public option is implemented, not only will it underpay physicians and hospitals in the same manner as Medicare and Medicaid, but it will result in an increase in wait times at the hospital and a decrease in your quality of care. If the government begins to tell doctors who they must see, what they can prescribe, and how to "best" administer care, the patient-doctor relationship will turn into a patient-government relationship. Combine this with lower reimbursements for doctors, and you've got a health care nightmare.

Additionally, the employer mandate under consideration would require employers that do not offer "adequate" insurance to pay an eight percent payroll tax – including those with an annual payroll over \$250,000. The "adequacy" of insurance coverage would be determined by bureaucrats in Washington, not doctors, hospitals, or even patients. This proposal does not fundamentally address the problem of unsustainable rising costs in our health care system. Running any small business is difficult, and putting additional financial burdens on these businesses would be harmful, particularly when they are already struggling.

Finally, there is the issue of how the majority plans to pay for the \$1 trillion overhaul. They've proposed \$800 billion in new tax hikes, including a tax on a large portion of our nation's small business owners, directly impacting the driving force of our economy. Additionally, they proposed \$500 billion worth of cuts to Medicare, which includes dramatic cuts to Medicare Advantage plans. Seniors don't deserve a reduction to benefits which they were promised and deserve.

To that end, I have cosponsored the Medical Rights Act (H.R. 2516) which would prohibit the federal government from regulating privately supported medicine, protecting the doctor-patient relationship against federal controls or rationing for care not paid for by the federal government.

I support a number of reforms that would help lower health care costs, without drastically increasing the size and scope of government or implementing tax hikes.

We have the best doctors, scientists and healthcare facilities in the world, therefore more emphasis must be placed on wellness and prevention. Up to one-third of the \$2.3 trillion spent on health care each year is unnecessary or duplicative. Currently, five preventable chronic diseases cause two-thirds of American deaths. The role of primary care providers should be strengthened and prioritized to keep people out of the emergency room. Financial incentives must be implemented in the workplace to encourage people to live healthy lifestyles recommended by their doctor.

To improve access to care, individuals and small businesses must be provided with tax credits, not penalties, which can be used to purchase health insurance. Health Savings Accounts are personal, tax free, savings accounts in which you, the patient, control how money is spent on your health care. Employers should be offered options, not mandates, to best serve their employees' health care needs.

Significant reform must also be made to the medical tort litigation system. The Government Accountability Office found that losses on medical malpractice claims, which make up the largest part of insurers' costs, appear to be the primary driver of rate increases. Instead of offering you lower prices for their services, doctors currently pay billions to protect themselves from lawsuits, while only 17 percent of lawsuits involve actual physician negligence.

Recently, I met with doctors and health care professionals from all over Florida's 16th district and heard firsthand their ideas and concerns regarding health care reform. It's important to hear from those in the profession, not Washington, D.C. bureaucrats, on how to best fix our nation's health care system. We are here in Congress to listen to the American people, and that's what I intend to continue doing.